



Working it out (Jen Webb)

✍ VERITY LA / 📅 FEBRUARY 5, 2019 /

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Getting there

This is the morning I wake from a dream of drowning, and wait for what comes next. Someone brings me tea I cannot drink, chocolates made of coconut. Someone brings me a map of the fire exits, and instructions about where we must meet. I look through the window, past someone's gesticulating hand. The traffic is getting busy: a red bus goes by, then a

purple bus, then another red bus. Someone shakes me by the shoulder, someone is holding the door open, and I guess I'm expected to step through. Do I have slippers? A robe? Is there time to find my way?

What we learned from history

Because they wrote in mud. Because they set out their calculations in unfired clay. And because though they knew precisely what was what, and how sine rubbed up against tangent, and what that might mean for the building of bridges and roads, no written record equals it never was. Now you sit at your microscope, reading Plimpton 322, recalculating their calculations, and with each trace of your pen there's a little more astonishment. To think that they, you say. To think we never knew. Later, in your office, I stand before the window and lift my skirt, the way you like. Bend over, you say, and I do. All the mysteries of maths, you say, are in the cleft between my breasts, in the vulval folds. You call it wondrous, historic. I settle myself across you. Business as usual. Waiting for terminal insight.

The first time we tried something new

The walls are blue, and the ceiling is blue, and the floor is grey: plastic, slippery when wet. You are considering your next moves. You are eyeing me up, measuring my scale against the scale of the room. At present I am calm, though cable ties are cutting into my wrists, and the gag in my mouth makes me gag. A cat makes itself at home in my lap. You stroke my hair. It could go any way, at this point: tragedy, comedy, eros. I am holding my breath, waiting for my cue.


Jen Webb is a Canberra-based poet, who arrived in the city via South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, the Western Australian outback, and Central Queensland. Jen is Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra, and co-editor of the scholarly journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*, and the literary journal of the




Australasian Association of Writing Programs, *Meniscus*. The ACT editor of the *Australian Book Review's* States of Poetry annual anthology, and co-editor of the bilingual anthology *Open Windows: Contemporary*

Australian Poetry, she is also the author of several poetry collections and of artist books. Her most recent poetry collections are *Sentences from the Archive* (<https://recentworkpress.com/product/sentences-from-the-archive/>). (Recent Work Press, 2016) and *Moving Targets* (<https://recentworkpress.com/product/moving-targets/>). (Recent Work Press, 2018).

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